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DEP URGES USE OF POLLUTED MINE WATER TO MEET FUTURE ENERGY NEEDS INSTEAD OF CLEAN WATER DURING U.S. DEPT. OF ENERGY WORKSHOP

239 Million Gallons Consumed by Power Plants Every Day

HARRISBURG (July 24) – On behalf of Gov. Mark Schweiker, Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Secretary David E. Hess today urged energy policy makers to consider using water from abandoned coal mines to meet their water needs for energy generation rather than using clean water during an “Emerging Issues” workshop sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) National Energy Technology Laboratory in Allegheny County.

“Supplies of clean water are not an inexhaustible resource, as drought conditions over the last seven years have proven,” said Secretary Hess. “The time has come to consider protecting our clean water resources and looking at ways we can use the billions of gallons of polluted water left from abandoned coal mines for consumptive uses in industry and power generation.”

Of the estimated 9.7 billion gallons of water used everyday in Pennsylvania, about 6 billion are used by energy production facilities, of which nearly 240 million gallons are consumed and not returned to rivers or groundwater.

“Pennsylvania has mine discharges that produce millions of gallons of water a day and underground mine pools that contain billions of gallons of polluted water,” said Secretary Hess. “Why use clean water for cooling power plants, when mine water can be treated and returned to the environment clean?”

Sources of polluted mine water in Pennsylvania range in size from a mine pool in Westmoreland County that contains an estimated 80 billion gallons of water and covers an area 50 miles long and 10 miles wide, to the Jeddo Discharge in Luzerne County that produces 3 million gallons an hour.

Secretary Hess pointed to a power plant in Carbon County where mine water is being used now.

“The Panther Creek plant draws water from the Lausanne Mine Tunnel for cooling as it generates enough energy to power 50,000 homes,” said Secretary Hess. “That’s 400 million gallons of water that doesn’t have to be taken from groundwater or surface water sources.”

“Treating and using mine water could be a real win-win for energy producers and the environment, because we can’t take water for granted any more” said Secretary Hess. “Today’s coal mining industry has helped reclaim over 20,000 acres of abandoned mines in the last seven years in Pennsylvania, it’s appropriate the rest of the energy industry get involved in cleaning up the polluted water left from abandoned mines as well.”

Today more than three-quarters of the surface coal mining permits issued in Pennsylvania are for re-mining abandoned mines which then are reclaimed to current standards by mine operators.

In addition, Pennsylvania has a dozen power plants that use coal refuse leftover from the mining industry as fuel which reclaim hundreds of acres of refuse piles while generating electricity.

“Statewide concerns about the future of Pennsylvania’s water resources lead Gov. Schweiker to propose a legislative initiative this year to help identify areas of the state where the demands for water will outstrip supplies,” said Secretary Hess. “Part of the equation we will look at is how demands for energy generation will factor into the future and how those demands can be met creatively, like by using mine water.”

Secretary Hess also encouraged energy policy makers to look to reducing energy demand in the future through the aggressive use of energy efficiency programs and by promoting green building programs as recommended by Gov. Schweiker’s Energy Task Force in March.

For more information on water resources, visit the PA PowerPort www.state.pa.us, PA KeyWord: "water resources" or for the Governor’s Energy Task Force Report, PA KeyWord: "energy."

***This press release is located on the PA Department of Environmental Protection’s Website
at:***

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